

Staff Summary

The Early Learning Council (ELC) met from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm on November 8, 2005. The agenda focused primarily on the Council's recommendations to the Washington Learns Steering Committee for the November 2005 interim report. (The recommendations, as revised based on Council input, are attached.)

Meeting Agenda and Goals: Regina Jones and Bob Watt opened the meeting with an overview of the agenda and the reminder that the Council's recommendations need to be submitted to the Steering Committee for review prior to the November 14th Steering Committee meeting.

Parenting Education and Support: Rep. Ruth Kagi facilitated a discussion about whether or not the scope of the Early Learning Council includes parent education and support, and if so, how should these be addressed in the Council recommendations? Bob Watt said that while the Council's immediate focus has been on near term deadlines, this discussion raises interesting issues about how Washington thinks about early learning. Is our focus care or is it early learning, including what we can do to help young parents?

Council members supported the broader focus and made the following points: research demonstrates the importance of early brain development and the link between parent involvement and quality in early learning; getting children off to a good start begins prior to birth; parents are their children's first teachers and best advocates; many children are not in the formal early learning system; family, friend and neighbor caregivers frequently care for the youngest and most vulnerable children; the health care system including pediatricians play an important role in supporting parents and early learning; early identification of at-risk children is critical; attachments between young children and their caregivers affect early learning; and the proposed TANF and child care reductions have implications for families and children (including stability of care).

There was unanimity within the Early Learning Council that parents; family, friend and neighbor care; and the health community have important roles to play and should be supported in helping young children get off to a great start. Council members agreed to modify the language in the Council's recommendations to reflect this consensus.

Council Recommendations for the Interim Report. Karen Tvedt started the discussion by questioning whether "Campaign for Early Learning" sends the message that the purpose of the Early Learning Council is short- rather than long-term. Council members agreed with this concern. After brainstorming about other possible "brands," the group decided to defer the decision—possibly to the new public-private partnership. Council members made specific suggestions to strengthen the tone of the "Rationale" and "Vision and Goals" sections of the document. Additions requested included language about an array of parent education and support options, supportive workplace policies, provider training and compensation, "appropriate" measurement, and the goals of the public-private partnership.

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- **Public-Private Partnership.** Council members strongly support the creation of a public-private partnership to encourage the government and private sector to work together at state and community levels to increase public awareness about the importance of early learning and to fund quality improvement efforts. Discussion centered on whether the public-private partnership should be part of the new early learning agency or be established as an independent organization. Some thought it would be easier to make the case for the Council's recommendations if the public-private partnership were part of the proposed new department. Others argued that the public-private partnership would be more powerful and have greater freedom and flexibility as a stand-alone organization. A stand-alone organization may also avoid potential state liability issues for private sector partners. While additional study is needed, the majority of Council members support a stand-alone public-private partnership. The Council agreed to retain the proposed language about public-private partnership in the recommendations with minor edits and elimination of the language in the second paragraph about local community competitive grants.
- **Cabinet-Level Department of Early Learning.** Once again there was discussion about the purpose of the new department, where it would fit size-wise in relationship to other state agencies, costs related to the creation of a new agency, and possible alternatives for achieving the same purposes (such as Pennsylvania's joint appointment across agencies or improved blending and braiding of funds across programs). Council members again affirmed their support for a new department to improve the visibility of and advocacy for early learning services; establish clear principles; create the platform on which to build early learning services; reduce service fragmentation; and improve service quality and access for communities, families and children.

Consistent with earlier discussions, members agreed to the inclusion of language about parent education and support and family, friend and neighbor care. Some members again spoke to the importance of early screening and identification of special needs, and for the inclusion of services for children with special needs. The Council concluded that it lacked the information and expertise needed to make recommendations about the inclusion of specific programs. While the group generally supported including early learning programs unless there are specific reasons to exclude them, there also was discussion about the need to be strategic, bring folks along, and proceed thoughtfully. Systems take time to build. Answers are needed about the specifics of each program and what would be gained (and lost) by including it? Who would be affected? Whatever decisions are made, relationships and ongoing coordination will be needed with programs not included in the new department. There was agreement that programs relating to school-age care such as licensing and subsidies should be included in the new department.

An ongoing board or council that is responsible to ensure coordination. While there is agreement that ongoing coordination will be needed between the new department and other programs at state and local levels, there were questions about how such a coordinating entity would relate to the new department and public-private partnership. This recommendation was deferred

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for future study by the Early Learning Council in consultation with the new department.

- **Preliminary design for a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and System of Tiered Reimbursement.** Bridgett Chandler, co-chair of the QRIS Technical Advisory Committee provided an overview of the preliminary design for the QRIS. Council members and audience participants worked briefly in small groups dealing with the QRIS categories, e.g., professional development and family and community support, and provided input to the TAC about the elements proposed for inclusion.

Rep. Kagi emphasized that HB 1152 only requires a preliminary design at this time and that the design will be refined over the next year, in part based on results from the pilot. Also noted were the importance of outreach to and input from providers, the availability of provider supports (including improved wages), inclusion of school-age care, the importance of family supports, and the possibility that tools developed for QRIS may also be appropriate for use with family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

Recognizing that more work is needed, the Early Learning Council endorsed the preliminary design and agreed to forward it for consideration by the Washington Learns Steering Committee.

Next Steps—Need for additional technical advisory committees? The following issues were suggested for study by technical advisory committees: the early learning benchmarks, public-private partnership, the new early learning department, QRIS, and family involvement.

Questions were raised about next steps for the benchmarks. Regina explained that there are plans for a letter from the Governor and OSPI describing next steps. A new leadership group will be formed to oversee a redesign effort; its initial focus will be to develop the framework for a redesign process and explore funding options. Feedback will be sought from those who are currently using the benchmarks.

Toward development of a work plan for the next six months, the co-chairs and staff will outline the ongoing work of the Council as well as the requirements of HB 1152 for discussion by the Council at its December meeting.

Correspondence. The Council received a letter from CISC about the large number of children in family, friend and neighbor care and the need for supports to this type of care. A letter reflecting the Council's views about the importance of early learning supports for family, friend and neighbor care will be drafted for signature by the Council co-chairs.

Reflection on Council process and work: how are we doing? Council members and the audience acknowledged the focus and rapid progress of the Council in moving its recommendations forward. Its inclusiveness and active involvement of audience members are appreciated. One audience member said that she believes early learning has the potential to shift the paradigm in education. There is now need for active outreach about the Council's recommendations as they enter the political process. Suggestions included: the need to be strategic, anticipate what skeptics might say

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about the Council recommendations; members providing outreach within their communities (members should let co-chairs and staff know about the outreach they are doing so we can keep track of the level of effort); the need for talking points (and/or a power point) for use by Council members; and the need to "take the show on the road" especially in eastern Washington.

Bob Watt adjourned the meeting at approximately 3:30 pm.